

## WASHINGTON CITY.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1858.

## THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE IN VIRGINIA.

At the time of writing we do not know what result, if any, has been arrived at by the democrats of Virginia, assembled in convention at Petersburg. The indications are that the convention is a very stormy one, more stormy even, if possible, than those of 1845 and 1851. We have explained the causes which render these bodies in Virginia always more or less boisterous, and we trust that in the present case, as in all past ones, the convention will act as a safety-valve for letting off all excitement and bad feeling from among the democracy, and that its excited debates will be succeeded by good feeling and concerted and combined effort on the part of all concerned in behalf of the fortunate nominee.

After all, the office of Virginia governor, honorable as it may be in name, is one very barren of power or authority. Since the days of Lord Dunmore and the vigorous struggles which were so long carried on between that royal governor and the Burgesses, Virginia has been afflicted with a chronic jealousy of the "one-man power." The first constitution of the Commonwealth, framed in 1776, made of the executive office nothing but a sort of head-clerkship of public accounts; and such was the jealousy with which the seers of the Old Dominion, then engaged in mortal conflict with George III, regarded this substitute for a King, that they set not only a legislature over him, composed of two houses, the popular one armed with all powers legislative and executive, but they also appointed some dozen or twenty conscript fathers of the State to watch over him incessantly, and to stand prepared at a moment's warning to put their feet upon the neck of the counterfeit tyrant. No act of the governor was legal or complete unless he had taken the advice of this executive council, and the family quarrels which were thus engendered between the members of the executive of our Mother of States and Statesmen were even more ferocious than those which now take place in party conventions such as that now in session at Petersburg.

In 1830 this plural, ponderous, and most unharmonious executive was continued in Virginia; the governor being still allowed no discretionary powers, which were all concentrated in the house of delegates; and being still subjected to the officious and vexatious surveillance of an executive council composed of this time of three members. If an account of but a dollar and a quarter for shoes furnished the negro servant attending in the Capitol, it could not be paid unless the advice of those grave sentinels perched upon the watch-towers of Virginia liberty, the three councillors, had been taken.

Unaware, however, in spite of the vigilance of the constitution framers of 1830, and by accidental enactment of the house of delegates in an unthoughtful moment, the governor did acquire a large patronage and power for a few years, in virtue of being *ex officio* chief of the State's Board of Public Works, a board which was charged with the construction of the extensive railroads and the great canal upon which the Commonwealth embarked between the years 1835 and 1850. The patronage of this board was very considerable, reaching, in the aggregate for all the works, some thirty millions of dollars; and the governorship sprang up at once into a considerable power in the State.

But this happy day was of very short duration. The constitutional convention of 1850, with full hand, struck down at once blow the whole purring fabric of a few years' growth. The constitution of '50 created a new board of public works, not elected, as the preceding one was, including the governor himself, by the legislature, but elected by the people; and it confined the governor once more to his old routine duties touching the public accounts, the militia, the penitentiary, and the pardoning prerogative. By this time, however, the ridiculous inutility of the executive council had become a by-word of derision, and the governor was relieved of the humiliating surveillance of this superfluous body.

Thus, over since the year 1776 the conventions and legislatures of Virginia have been making unceasing warfare upon King George and his despised viceroys, Lord Dunmore, in the person of their unlucky governor; and such is the traditional hatred which has been unconsciously cherished in the popular bosom of Virginia to this day, of the one-man power, that it is as much as any man's popularity in the State is worth to be for a single term governor of Virginia. That prostrated figure in the State coat of arms, those biting words of *sempiternus tyrannus*, are always more or less personified in the mind's eye of the people by their unlucky governor. He can do nothing that will please them. His every act is either a subject of their censure or ridicule. His office is a mausoleum of reputation and popularity.

The angry occurrences at Petersburg are but another instance of the "much ado about nothing." There is no patronage belonging to the office to excite the cupidity of the corrupt; there is no power in the office to enlist the solicitude of a great party. There is nothing but the barren honor attaching to the title of Governor which is at stake in the convention. The excitement at Petersburg illustrates, however, the disinterested zeal in their politics which characterizes the masses in Virginia. Their enthusiasm in these matters is eminently Platonic. They will struggle with infinitely more zeal and desperation for an office of honor than for one of emolument.

## POLITICAL ROMANCE AND FORTUNE-TELLERS.

The astrologers, fortune-tellers, seers, and prophets are not all engaged in the disclosure of love, marriage, long voyages and short troubles, of letters to come full of good news and of money and a variety of other matters, "very important if true." Our blessed country is full of political prophets from whom it is next to impossible to hide a single event of the future—men who, it must be confessed, tell a great many truths, and who, though not by unquestionable authority. They make the entire circuit of affairs—get on all sides of every question—circumnavigate the political globe, and describe its topography and geography with a minuteness which is certain to make them the best of prophets and seers. The public mind is singularly alive to the recollection of everything that is foretold; and equally oblivious to the whole record of false reports, so that one stands in no danger of being convicted of failure, while the chances are immensely on his side that he

will anticipate something that is to come. These active and astute members of society have busied themselves of late very much about the affairs of the Union Establishment, and have indicated so many changes in its organization, that if a messenger should happen to be called away from his duties for a day or two, they could certainly point to a paragraph foretelling it all. They have, also, about twice a week, rearranged Mr. Buchanan's cabinet; and as for the contents of the message and the reports of the departments, they are exposed with all of Judge Edmonds' accuracy in spiritual manifestations concerning the Atlantic cable. The latter gentleman is informed by some telegraphic operator who has gone to "the spirit land" that the difficulty in the cable is somewhere near the Irish coast. No doubt his informant is interested in some rival line, or he would have given us the exact point of obstruction and the precise means required to remove it. We are not prepared, of course, to question the accuracy of Judge Edmonds' medium; but, whoever he may be, he is a long way in advance of the seers who disclose so much about this paper.

It is a great good fortune that we have in the United States a free press and the fullest liberty of speech. These are blessings of incalculable value—a sure means of producing conflict between mind and mind, greatly to the advantage of the whole community. If in this way our progress can be secured to the extent of opening men's minds to a knowledge of the past, present, and future, inasmuch that no "secrets shall be hid," we shall soon obviate the necessity of maintaining schools, colleges, and even newspapers. If, however, one is to judge of the radical failures of late of the news-mongers to foretell the truth or to keep the world advised of what has actually taken place, we greatly fear the day is distant when we can dispense with the press as an organ of sensible discussion, if not of prophecy and fortune-telling. This latter department of journalism, we respectfully suggest to our great contemporaries in New York, is in very much the condition of a small village which happens to be blessed with half a dozen busy-bodies, who run from house to house picking up news, and contrive, after a little time, to get the whole community by the ears. Some genies in New York, who has an axe to grind, employs a Washington agent to send express by telegraph a telling intimation message. It is thus stamped as an important affair; and is read by thousands who regard it as a wonderful evidence of the sagacity and prophetic powers of the inquisitorial correspondent.

It is perfectly fair to say that nine-tenths of all the matter sent from this city over the wires is either mere idle speculation or absolutely unimportant. So far has this work progressed that it becomes very doubtful whether the home readers of the journals referred to do not demand such stuff as a species of recreation for the body rather than as an employment of the mind.

## THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES AND THE REPUBLICAN PARTY.

The Tribune is making a strong effort to elevate Mr. Raymond, of the Times, in the estimation of the country, by proving that he has abandoned the republican party. It is certainly very kind in Mr. Greeley thus to bolster up and certify to the patriotism and good sense of Mr. Raymond; but we beg leave to suggest that too much stress should not be laid on the fact that the Times editor was ever a member of the republican family. The people of the United States are proverbially charitable; inasmuch that it is extensively believed that "new converts" stand more than an even chance of promotion over those who never offended. Be this as it may, we do dislike error that, when a man abandons its councils and puts aside its alluresments, we feel very much like putting rings on his fingers and feasting him with the good things in store for all such. Mr. Raymond has offended the republicans and the Tribune; but we do not see that he has delighted the democrats very much. Every one must respect him all the more because the republicans distrust and abuse him; but he is yet merely "under conviction," and we prefer to wait a little before inviting him to democratic retreats, where he may be shielded from the lather and razors of the Tribune-shave.

LAW AND ORDER.—The abolition journals are terribly shocked at the failure of the grand jury of Charleston, South Carolina, to find bills of indictment in the matter of the Echo and the captured Africans carried into that port. We know nothing of the testimony brought before the jury; but conceding it to have been sufficient to establish the guilt of the parties, it is perfectly clear that the authorities referred to have grossly neglected to discharge their duty in the premises. But it looks queer enough to see the Tribune and its higher-law associates holding up to public reprobation the people of South Carolina for not rigidly enforcing the law. The parties who set all law at defiance, not in an accidental sort of way, but deliberately—by resolutions of public meetings, by political platforms and creeds, by precept and example, in Kansas, in Cincinnati, Detroit, Chicago, everywhere in the free States—now complain of the failure of a grand jury in a southern city to enforce the statutes of Congress! The Burns rescuers—the directors of the underground railroad, the men who teach and preach that it is a sin against Heaven to hold political relations with slaveholders—are dissatisfied with the Charleston jury, without knowing a word of the testimony before that tribunal in the Echo case. After all, however, it is rather a good sign. Perhaps the abolitionists are willing to come to a general understanding that hereafter the laws shall be enforced, "though the heavens fall." Has the "higher law" been repealed?

Hon. John C. Breckinridge, of Kentucky, arrived in this city yesterday evening, and has taken rooms at the National Hotel. He is in excellent health. Hon. Wm. Barksdale, of Mississippi, was invited by resolution of the house of representatives of that State, on the 26th ult., to deliver an address on the politics of the Union. Mr. Barksdale, in reply, stated that he would cheerfully have accepted the invitation but for the pressure of indispensable engagements requiring his immediate departure for the scene of his duties at Washington.

The marine losses of the year 1858, thus far, are less than half the amount of last year. The value of the property totally lost at sea this year, exclusive of damage to vessels not amounting to a total loss, and of partial losses of cargo, is estimated at \$8,045,391. Last year in the same time, the amount was \$16,250,800. The losses of the month of November were \$663,500, and included seven ships—two large ships, and five of medium tonnage. Both the large ships and one of the smaller class were destroyed by fire.

## PERU AND ECUADOR—THE ORIGIN OF THE WAR.

(From the Correspondent of the *Piutano* at Lima, Oct. 19.)

The readers of my South American correspondence in the *Piutano* have noticed that a misunderstanding between Peru and Ecuador has been from month to month assuming a more angry appearance, until it could scarcely go to a farther extreme without venturing in bloodshed. It was reported a few weeks since that the matters at issue were likely to be amicably settled, but the news by the last steamer from the South Pacific coast does not lead to the same result. As if a war should ensue between the two republics, Bolivia, Chili, and Venezuela may possibly become complicated, it may be interesting to your readers to understand the origin and progress of the imbroglio, and so I have dotted down the facts for them.

The proximate cause of the difficulties between Peru and Ecuador was the buccannery expedition of ex-President Flores, with his California filibusters, against Guayaquil in 1852, which it was charged that the then government of Peru, under the presidency of Echenique, sympathized with, and even connived at, by affording shelter and aid to the vessels of the buccannery, but which that practical foray of Gen. Flores against his own country entailed in an ignominious failure, but, of course, left much bad blood in Ecuador against Peru. Diplomatic relations between them, however, were soon restored, and Señor Saenz was sent as Peruvian minister to Quito; Señor Montoya, and after him, Sr. Francisco Aguerre were sent as Ecuadorian representatives to Lima. This apparently amicable state of their relations continued until Gen. Castilla, through the agency of a successful revolution, came into power in Peru, in 1855. Soon after, Gen. Flores, the hereditary enemy of the present "dynastic" party in Ecuador, was named as a candidate for President of that country, and a pension was awarded to him, ostensibly for his services in the war of independence.

This act of Castilla's was viewed by Ecuador as unneighborly and even hostile to her, as it brought her most dreaded enemy in close proximity with her frontiers. Her government became so alarmed at the prospect of fostering new expeditions against the country and the constitutional order of things. The Ecuadorian charge at Lima protested against these acts of Peru; but, receiving no satisfactory explanation, he demanded his passports and went home, and Señor Saenz was recalled from Quito. This rupture of diplomatic relations continued until 1857, when Señor Juan Celestino Caceres arrived in Quito as minister resident of Peru. He made his diplomatic debut by sending a despatch to the Ecuadorian government, couched in rather an imperious tone, on the subject of the territorial limits of the two republics, and in saying this first communication with a belated protest against the "alienation" of territory within a district of country comprising nearly the moiety of Ecuador, and extending northward and westward to Papallacta, almost in sight of the city of Quito—all which area claims is in dispute between the countries, and ought not to be occupied by either until their respective claims are respectively adjudicated.

By way of elucidation it may be remarked, that the holders of a certain class of old Colombian bonds, for which Ecuador became proportionally liable, agreed to receive wild lands in part liquidation of their claims; and that thirty years since, and to Quito with a view to the redemption of these bonds, and the consequent arrangement that Señor Caceres protested. In further explanation of the present imbroglio it is proper to state, that soon after the appearance of Señor Caceres in Quito, Col. Andres Maria Alvarez, a native of Venezuela, who married in Lima, where he has been a resident for more than thirty years, and who was at one time a mission as *chefe de affaires* from the then government of Caracas. The sole object of Alvarez's mission, it appeared in the sequel, was to advance certain pecuniary claims which ex-President Flores, who is a native of Venezuela, had made against Ecuador, he having ostensibly renounced all political claims, and retired to his native land. And although the alleged purpose of Señor Caceres's mission was the adjustment of the boundary question, it was believed and publicly proclaimed by the best informed persons in the capital that his main business was to back Col. Alvarez in his efforts to lay Ecuador under a contribution of not less than \$300,000 to Flores for the alleged losses of property, &c., and the restoration and zeal with which Señor Caceres outdid himself into the business pertaining to Col. Alvarez's mission, viz: the claims and demands of Gen. Flores confirmed that belief in his ulterior designs.

Each asperity of language was indulged in by both. Col. Alvarez, the cabinet at Quito in the discussion respecting Flores's claims. Indeed, some language was used by the latter side which might very readily be construed as insulting to the Peruvian nation; and after Col. Alvarez's mission had been cut short, and he had left the country under "protest," Señor Caceres took up the cause in a very angry and unbridled correspondence with the Ecuadorian government, by way of resenting the affront offered in language in despatches addressed to Col. Alvarez, the "representative of Flores," as he was commonly called. (See far as his ostensible mission was concerned, it was not until the latter part of the year, when the Ecuadorian government, by way of resenting the affront offered in language in despatches addressed to Col. Alvarez, the "representative of Flores," as he was commonly called. 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